

RESEARCH SERVICE MEMORANDUM  
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE  
ANIMAL CARE AND USE PROGRAM  
Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee

1. PURPOSE: To provide policy and procedures for the operation of the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC).

2. POLICY:

a. The Veterans Health Administration Office of Research and Development (ORD) is responsible for establishing policy for laboratory animal use in the VA System. Local medical centers are responsible for ensuring proper oversight and care for research animals housed at VA or purchased with VA funds. The Director is the institutional official responsible for ensuring that the animal research program complies with federal regulations and guidelines that govern animal research and is the point of contact for correspondence with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Public Health Service (PHS), Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care (AAALAC), and Office of Laboratory Welfare (OLAW). The medical center will maintain an IACUC, which is responsible for the oversight and evaluation of the institution's Animal Care and Use Program. The IACUC will function in accordance with guidelines provided by the ORD and assure compliance with other regulatory guidelines affecting animal research, e.g., PHS policy, Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, USDA Animal Welfare Act requirements.

b. The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), functions as a subcommittee of the Research and Development (R&D) Committee for the South Texas Veterans Health Care System. The IACUC reports to the hospital Director (Institutional Official) through the R&D Committee.

c. The institution, through the Research and Development office, will provide sufficient administrative and secretarial resources for the IACUC to conduct its prescribed duties.

d. The use of animals in VA research is a privilege granted with the understanding and expectation that such research will be conducted according to the highest ethical and legal standards. The basic principles governing animal research in the VA, to guide the IACUC, are as follows:

- (1) The fewest number of animals needed to achieve scientific objectives should be used.
- (2) The least sentient species that will permit the attainment of research objectives should be used.
- (3) The least painful or distressful procedures needed to meet research objectives should be used.
- (4) All reasonable measures to minimize pain and distress to animals should be utilized.
- (5) The principles of replacement, reduction, and refinement should always be considered when planning and conducting studies.

(6) Procedures that would be considered painful in a human should be considered painful in an animal.

3. PROCEDURES:

a. Membership. The STVHCS Director shall appoint members of the IACUC in writing for renewable terms. Members may be appointed upon recommendation from the IACUC and the R&D Committee. The committee shall consist of not less than five voting members and shall include as a minimum one Veterinary Medical Consultant (ex officio) with laboratory animal experience, one practicing scientist experienced in research involving animals, one non-scientific member, one individual not affiliated with the STVHCS, and one member of the R&D Committee. Members shall serve three-year terms, renewable upon re-appointment by the Director. The Administrative Officer for Research and Development and the Veterinary Medical Unit (VMU) Supervisor are ex-officio without voting privilege and serve in an advisory capacity only. IACUC chairs shall serve one-year renewable appointments. Chairs may not simultaneously chair another subcommittee and should be a more senior scientist with animal research experience.

b. Meetings: Meetings will be held at least monthly. Members unable to attend should promptly notify and send their protocol review comments to the IACUC coordinator.

(1) Quorum: A quorum (greater than 50% of voting members) will be required to conduct business. A member having a scientific, monetary, or personal conflict of interest for a protocol may not participate in the discussion and/or approval of the protocol.

(2) Minutes: Minutes will be maintained in accordance with VHA Handbook 1200.7, documenting actions taken, members present and times of recusal and voting record. Minutes will be written and published within 3 weeks of the meeting date. After approval at the following meeting, the chair will sign the minutes. Copies of minutes will be forwarded to the Institutional Official through the R&D Committee for review.

c. Records Maintenance: Minutes of the IACUC meetings (including records of attendance, IACUC activities and deliberations), Semi-Annual Reports, all PHS, USDA, AAALAC, and other reports and correspondence related to the animal care and use program will be maintained for at least 3 years. Records of individual protocols will be maintained for at least 3 years after the end of the study.

d. Functions.

(1) Oversight and evaluation of the institution's Animal Care and Use Program:

(a) The IACUC is proactive in its evaluation and quality improvement activities related to the institution's Animal Care and Use Program.

(b) The standard operating procedures related to the institution's Animal Care and Use Program will be reviewed by the Veterinary Medical Officer and approved annually by the IACUC.

(2) Research Proposal Review. The IACUC must review and approve, require modifications to, or withhold approval of all research proposals when the animal research is supported by VA funds and/or conducted on VA premises. The IACUC must assure protocol meets all animal regulatory guidelines. Animal research involves any live vertebrate animal used

or intended for use in research, research training, experimentation, biological testing, or a related purpose as defined in VHA Handbook 1200.7.

(a) Investigators must consult with the VMC prior to submission of a protocol to the IACUC.

(b) All proposals and modifications will be reviewed by the full committee and all members will receive all of the protocol forms. Each new protocol will be assigned to two voting committee members, termed primary and secondary reviewers, who are expected to lead a discussion of the protocol.

(c) The VA Animal Component of Research Protocol (ACORP) must be used for review of applications being submitted to the VA for funding. The grant proposal and/or entire research protocol will also be available to the IACUC reviewers. If a protocol has been approved by the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA) IACUC, indicating it is being done at the VA, but is not seeking VA funding, the VA IACUC may accept the final approved version of the UTHSCSA animal form for review. NOTE: VA IACUC may impose more stringent criteria for approval.

(d) The IACUC will consider the following in the review of an animal protocol:

1. Scientific validity and experimental design.
2. Relevance to the VA and appropriateness for the local institution (e.g. appropriate expertise and availability of the necessary resources).
3. Rationale and purpose of the proposed use of animals.
4. Justification of the species and number of animals requested, including statistical justification if necessary.
5. Availability or appropriateness of the use of less-invasive procedures, other species, isolated organ preparation, cell or tissue culture, or computer simulation.
6. Adequacy of training and experience of personnel in the procedures used.
7. Unusual housing and husbandry requirements, including food or fluid restriction.
8. Appropriate sedation, analgesia, and anesthesia.
9. Unnecessary duplication of experiments.
10. Use of prolonged physical restraint.
11. Conduct of multiple major operative procedures.

12. Criteria and process for timely intervention, removal of animals from a study, or euthanasia if painful or stressful outcomes are anticipated.

13. Post-procedure care.

14. Method of euthanasia or disposition of animal.

15. Safety of the working environment for personnel.

(e) Prior to approving any protocol, the IACUC must ensure that all staff listed on the protocol has met training requirements.

(f) The IACUC will advise the investigator in writing of its actions, to include any stipulations to be met prior to IACUC approval.

(g) No animal work may begin before receipt of IACUC and R&D Committee approvals.

(3) Annual Review of Proposals. The IACUC must review the conduct of all animal protocols annually. The funding period of a project has no bearing on the need for annual reviews and triennial reviews. Protocols originally approved based on UTHSCSA approved form must also provide the latest UTHSCSA continuing review approval to confirm active UTHSCSA status

(a) Annually, prior to the anniversary of IACUC approval, the IACUC will review a request from the investigator for continued approval. The request will include at a minimum the IACUC approval number, IACUC approval date, title of project, species used, whether animal use is ongoing or to be terminated, number of animals used to date, personnel actively participating in the animal research, progress during the previous year, and any proposed changes to the protocol. Modification requests with an amended ACORP or approved amended UTHSCSA animal research protocol must be submitted with the form for IACUC review and approval of any change.

(b) Third Annual Review. Prior to the third anniversary of VA-funded protocols, the IACUC must conduct a complete re-review of each approved protocol. This will be accomplished by having the investigator submit a new protocol utilizing the latest version of the protocol form. On the other hand, the IACUC will conduct a 5-year review of all UTHSCSA protocols approved by reciprocity.

(4) Semiannual Program Review and Semiannual Facility Inspection. The IACUC must conduct a self-assessment review of the program for animal care and use and must inspect all animal facilities and investigator areas used for animal procedures or housing longer than 12 hours every six months.

(a) At least three voting members (including the veterinarian) must conduct the review and inspection.

(b) The VA assessment form designated by the VA Central Office Chief Veterinary Officer will be used to document and report the IACUC's program review and inspection. The report will identify any significant deficiencies (a threat to the health or safety of

the animals) and will distinguish these from minor deficiencies. If facility or program deficiencies are identified, the report will contain a specific plan of action with a timeline to correct the deficiencies. Any departures from the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals or PHS policy will be described, and the reasons for the departure provided.

(c) The VA IACUC will review and evaluate the UTHSCSA IACUC semi-annual self-assessment in lieu of its own review of the university program. The UTHSCSA IACUC semi-annual self-assessment will be approved by the convened VA IACUC.

(d) As part of the program review, the IACUC will randomly review IACUC records representing at least 5% of the total active projects (a minimum of five).

(e) The report of the Semi-annual Program Review will be evaluated and approved by the convened IACUC.

(f) The report approved by the IACUC, with inclusion of any minority opinions and views, will be reviewed during a meeting that includes the IACUC chair, Veterinary Medical Consultant, one or more research administrators, and the hospital Director (Institutional Official) and the Director will sign to indicate his/her review. The IACUC Semi-annual Report may not be altered by any local official after a majority of voting IACUC members have approved the report.

(g) The report is submitted through the Hospital Director/Institutional Official to the Chief Veterinary Medical Officer within 60 days of review.

5. Suspension of Projects. The IACUC may suspend an activity that it previously approved if it determines that the activity is not being conducted in accordance with the description of that activity provided by the Principal Investigator and approved by the IACUC, or if there are concerns regarding the safety or welfare of laboratory animals or the safety, rights, or welfare of research staff or others. The IACUC may suspend an activity only after review of the matter at a properly-convened IACUC meeting and with the suspension vote by a majority of the quorum. The IACUC will notify the ACOS for R&D, Institutional Official, Office of Research Oversight, VA Chief Veterinary Medical Officer, USDA, PHS, and AAALAC within 15 business days of suspensions of protocols.

6. Allegations of Improper Animal Care or Use. All allegations of improper animal care and use must be reviewed promptly by the IACUC, and investigated if warranted. A written report of the review or investigation needs to be approved by a majority of a convened IACUC quorum and sent to the Director through the ACOS for R&D. If preliminary findings suggest that an allegation represents a reportable deficiency, i.e., any serious or continuing non-compliance with PHS policy, suspensions of protocols, or failure to correct a significant deficiency, the appropriate agencies will be contacted. The IACUC follows the institution's procedures to ensure prevention of reprisals against whistle blowers who report potential deficiencies in the animal care and research use program, and to protect anonymity to the extent required by law.

7. Any unanticipated incidents, loss of animal life, work-related serious injury to personnel involved in animal research, suspensions or terminations, or serious or continuing noncompliance with VA or other Federal requirements related to animal research (e.g., VHA Handbook 1200.7, the Animal Welfare Act at 9 CFR 1, 2, and 3; the PHS Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals; the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals) will be reported to the ACOS for R&D and Institutional Official, and the appropriate oversight agencies such as the Office of Research Oversight, VA Chief Veterinary Medical Officer,

USDA, PHS, and AAALAC within 15 business days as detailed in VHA Handbook 1200.7 and VHA Handbook 1058.01.

8. Requests for use of human diagnostic or treatment resources for animal use will be reviewed and approved by the IACUC per VHA Handbook 1200.7.

4. REFERENCES: VHA Handbook 1200.7, May 27, 2005.  
VHA Handbook 1058.01  
Animal Welfare Act at 9 CFR 1, 2, and 3  
PHS Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals  
Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals

5. RESCISSIONS: Research Service Memorandum 06-11, May 25, 2006.

6. RECERTIFICATION: November 2012.

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PETER MELBY, M.D.  
Associate Chief of Staff for  
Research and Development